

Preface

This book pays homage to Lionel Murphy, father and founder of Australian civil celebrancy. I think of him as an idiosyncratic secular saint. That is, a flawed human being, who devoted himself in service to the common good, most particularly those without privilege or influence. Saintlike, he was dreadfully persecuted at the end of his life of service. Clearly I am biased. I am grateful for Murphy's vision, which urges me to persist in exercising the freedom he granted and realising the consequences that follow, as cultural catalyst and maker of ceremonies. *Part one* speaks of Lionel Murphy's life, work and times with specific reference to his creation of the civil celebrant programme.

I tell of my journey as celebrant, co-designer, maker and conductor of secular ceremony, concluding with something of my practice in making ceremony and my lineage in ritual and sociodrama. I grew up with religious and secular rituals threading through my conservative, isolated country childhood and I loved them. I interwove them in turn with the stories of faery, myth and magic I also loved to read. So the notion of self-apprenticeship came naturally to me. Our way of life meant learning by doing and from observing and interacting with the world all around - the university of life. My life now is ritual and ceremony, co-created and brought to form through the conversations with my clients. The ceremony is rich and complex with the dynamic lives and spirits of those involved, including the guests. As I continue my practice I learn more, am surprised and energised more and know there is ever more to learn so I maintain my sense of apprenticeship. Lionel Murphy was nothing if not a risk taker. I consider that I also, as a celebrant, must be a risk taker. Making ceremony is my life work. This is *Part Two*.

In *Part Three* I share some vignettes. I have allowed myself to write fully of the uniqueness of each ceremony to convey the magic that happens, when the ceremony touches deeply those with whom I work. I have avoided description of tasks, structure and organisation, not wanting to present formulas. Preparing, assisting, making and conducting ceremony is a wandering, wondering, troubling process, requiring collaboration, spaciousness, time, care, patience and gentle, firm leadership. One must be prepared to sit with complexity, confusion and contradiction until a sound, perhaps beautiful, resolution is reached. Yet this work falls into the background in the vignettes. I hope it is there just enough for you as the reader to imagine its fullness. Here, I endeavour to mirror the art of ceremony itself where its beauty and simplicity belies the complexity of its construction. The last thing to be said about them is that the mode of writing indicates that they have become part of the universal story of what it is to be human.

The First Nations people of the Western Desert were said to have informed Prime Minister Gough Whitlam (when he sought meetings with them regarding land rights) that they were available only at those times when they were not engaged in making ceremony for country, for months at a time, depending on the season and other contingencies. May we all be so committed to giving all the time required for ceremonies that matter. May this book make a worthwhile contribution to the practice of Australian civil celebrancy and ceremony making.